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CENTRE DE RECHERCHE
SUR L'HISTOIRE DU
MONDE ATLANTIQUE
Faculté des Lettres
BP 1025
44036 Nantes Cedex

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SOCIÉTÉ FRANÇAISE
D'HISTOIRE D'OUTRE-MER
9, rue Robert-de-Flers 75015 Paris
Diffusion : L'Harmattan
7, rue de l'École-Polytechnique
75005 Paris

THE IMPACT OF SLAVE TRADE EXPORTS ON THE POPULATION OF THE WESTERN COAST OF AFRICA, 1700-1850

I. *NEW PRESSES FOR OLD GRAPES.*

The computer stands as the panacea and as the temptation for our age. Its capacity to pursue a given logic with relentless calculation provides, in this case, some hope of making up for scarcity of data, in order to provide an answer to an important question on the historical links of Africa to the wider world. The question is whether the export of large numbers of slaves from Western Africa in the period from 1650 to 1850 caused a reduction in the population of the area from which they came. The wealth of recent studies on the Atlantic slave trade and on slavery in the New World has caused the question to be posed with more insistence and relevance than ever, but the absence of consistent demographic data on continental Africa before the twentieth century has prevented any clear answer from being proposed (1).

Current research efforts on this question are following two paths. The first emphasizes retrieval and analysis of more data (2). This work indicates already that, although the task of assembling scattered and hidden source materials will require many years, data do exist which will ultimately permit an assessmemt of the size, structure and changes in pre-twentieth-century African populations. The second path is being taken up in a series of attempts to magnify the value of existing data through more powerful techniques (3).

(1) Key studies on the Atlantic slave trade include Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade : A Census* (Madison, 1969) ; Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese, eds, *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere : Quantitative Studies* (Princeton, 1975) ; Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn, eds., *The Uncommon Market : Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York, 1979) ; Jean Mettas, *Répertoire des expéditions négrières françaises au XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Serge Daget (Paris, 1978).

(2) Martin A. Klein and Claire C. Robertson, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison, 1983) ; John Thornton, « The Slave Trade in Eighteenth Century Angola : Effects on Demographic Structures », *Canadian Journal of African Studies 14*, 3 (1980), 417-428 ; Joseph C. Miller, *Way of Death* , Madison, 1988.

(3) Patrick Manning, « The Enslavelment of Africans : A Demographic Model », *Canadian Journal of African Studies 15*, 3 (1981), 499-526 ; John Thornton, « Demographic Effect of the Slave Trade on Western Africa, 1500-1850 » in Christopher Fyfe and David McMaster, eds., *African Historical Demography*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 1980), 691-720 ; Joseph Inikori, « Introduction », in Inikori, ed., *Forced Migration* (London, 1982), 13-60.

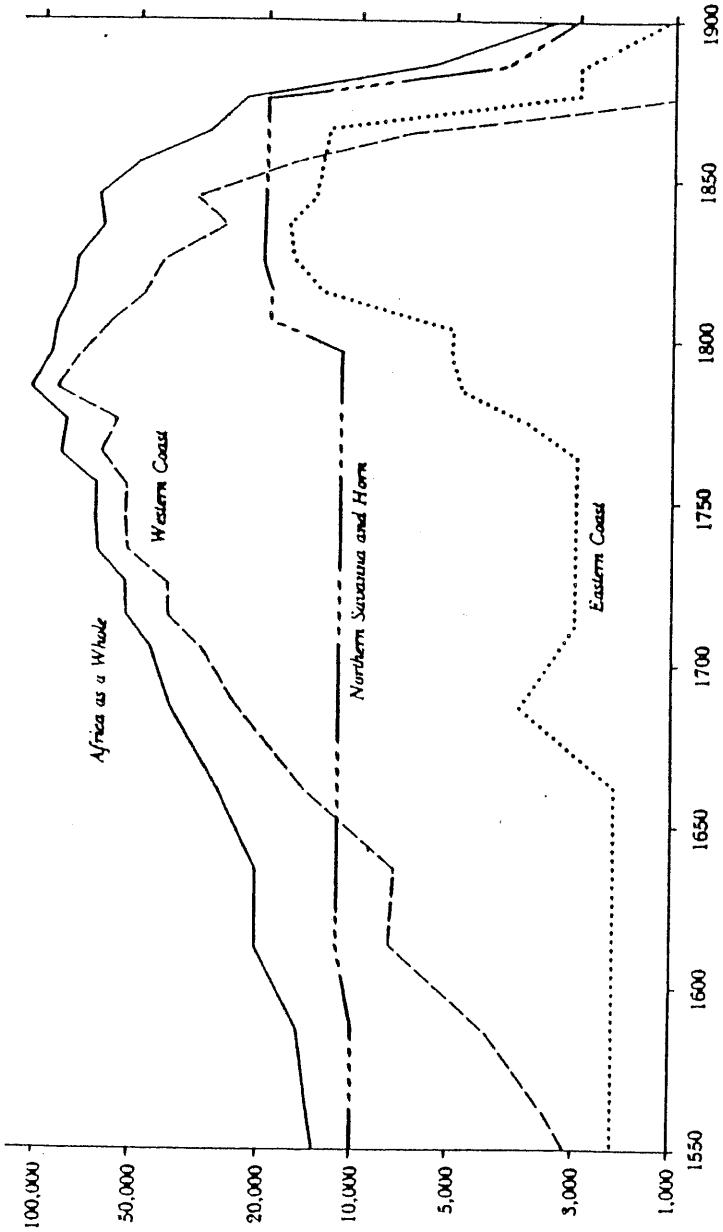

Fig. 1. *Estimated annual average of slaves exported from Africa.*

This study follows the second path : it is an attempt to short-cut the waiting period by using extra-African data on the Atlantic slave trade in a simulation model of the slave trade constructed with the aid of general principles of demography and assumptions — many of them verifiable — on the conduct of slave trade. It represents a further step in applying the concept of using data on African ties to the outside world as a « window » on domestic African affairs : this concept is applicable in economic and demographic affairs, where relatively determinate relations exist between the persons or goods entering or leaving Africa and the persons or goods on the African continent (4).

The analysis is at an aggregate and continental level. Local variations within this great region were, of course, considerable. But knowledge of the overall impact of Atlantic slave exports on Africa is important to addressing Africa's role in the modern world economy (5). The simulation model, in addition, is most easily applied at this continental level. Figure 1 shows estimated levels of slave exports for the Western Coast of Africa and for other African regions (6).

The results I propose are that the export of slaves from Western Africa — some nine million slaves reached the New World between 1700 and 1850 — reduced the population of the area from which they were drawn for most of that time, and substantially transformed the structure of the remaining population, in particular by raising the ratio of women to men by roughly ten percent. The simulation model projects that, in addition to the nine million slaves exported, seven million persons became domestic slaves and five million persons met premature deaths as a result of slave trade.

(4) Patrick Manning, *Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960* (Cambridge, 1982), 88-90, 115-119.

(5) J.D. Fage, « Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Context of West African History, *Journal of African History 10*, 3 (1969), 393-404 ; Fage, « The Effect of the Export Slave Trade on African Populations », in R.P. Moss and R.J.A. Rathbone, eds., *The Population Factor in African Studies* (London, 1975), 15-23.

(6) Figure 1 is reproduced from Patrick Manning, « Contours of Slavery and Social Change in Africa », *American Historical Review 88*, 4 (1983), 840.

	female		male
80+	0.24		0.21
75-79	0.60	*	0.56
70-74	1.34	*	1.22
65-69	2.25	**	2.05
60-64	3.15	***	2.91
55-59	3.93	****	3.73
50-54	4.59	*****	4.48
45-49	5.18	*****	5.18
40-44	5.75	******	5.85
35-39	6.37	******	6.51
30-34	7.04	*******	7.17
25-29	7.74	********	7.88
20-24	8.48	********	8.65
15-19	9.21	*********	9.38
10-14	9.86	**********	9.98
5-9	10.67	**********	10.72
0-4	13.60	**********	13.52
Total	100.00		100.00

Total pop. : 200.00
0-14 as % pop. : 0.34
60-80 as % pop. : 0.07
F 15-44 as % M 20-59 : 0.90

	female		male
80+	0.08		0.07
75-79	0.20		0.19
70-74	0.45		0.41
65-69	0.75	*	0.68
60-64	1.05	*	0.97
55-59	1.31	*	1.24
50-54	1.53	**	1.49
45-49	1.73	**	1.73
40-44	1.92	**	1.95
35-39	2.12	**	2.17
30-34	2.35	**	2.39
25-29	2.58	***	2.63
20-24	2.93	***	2.88
15-19	3.07	***	3.13
10-14	3.29	***	3.33
5-9	3.56	****	3.57
0-4	4.53	*****	4.51
Total	33.33		33.34

Total pop. : 66.67
0-14 as % pop. : 0.34
60-80 as % pop. : 0.07
F 15-44 as % M 20-59 : 0.90

Fig. 2. *Year 1 : Initial raided (1) and raiders (2) populations.*

	female		male
80+	0.25		0.21
75-79	0.63	*	0.53
70-74	1.35	*	1.20
65-69	2.10	**	1.88
60-64	2.71	***	2.46
55-59	3.11	***	2.92
50-54	3.47	***	3.35
45-49	3.82	****	3.68
40-44	4.29	****	4.22
35-39	4.58	*****	4.60
30-34	4.80	*****	4.84
25-29	5.30	*****	5.36
20-24	6.09	******	6.19
15-19	7.01	*******	7.06
10-14	7.61	********	7.64
5-9	8.10	********	8.34
0-4	9.78	*********	9.91
Total	75.02		74.46

Total pop. : 149.48
0-14 as % pop. : 0.34
60-80 as % pop. : 0.09
F 15-44 as % M 20-59 : 0.91

	female		male
80+	0.12		0.10
75-79	0.30		0.27
70-74	0.67	*	0.56
65-69	1.10	*	0.92
60-64	1.57	**	1.28
55-59	2.00	**	1.63
50-54	2.42	**	1.98
45-49	2.84	***	2.28
40-44	3.33	***	2.68
35-39	3.81	****	3.16
30-34	4.33	****	3.70
25-29	4.79	*****	4.29
20-24	5.22	*****	4.90
15-19	5.59	******	5.47
10-14	5.95	******	5.96
5-9	6.51	*******	6.72
0-4	8.22	********	8.42
Total	58.77		54.31

Total pop. : 113.08
0-14 as % pop. : 0.37
60-80 as % pop. : 0.06
F 15-44 as % M 20-59 : 1.10

Fig. 3. *Year 40 : Raided (1) and slave society (2) populations.*

	female		male
80+	0.00013	:	0.00006
75-79	0.00062	:	0.00055
70-74	0.00221	:	0.00168
65-69	0.00446	:	0.00334
60-64	0.00670	* : *	0.00513
55-59	0.00735	* :	0.00442
50-54	0.00847	* : *	0.00528
45-49	0.00973	* : *	0.00608
40-44	0.01066	* : *	0.00694
35-39	0.01188	* : *	0.00793
30-34	0.02078	** :	0.00417
25-29	0.04570	***** : *	0.00919
20-24	0.05202	***** : *	0.01049
15-19	0.06052	****** : *	0.01247
10-14	0.04075	**** : ***	0.02710
5-9	0.03768	**** : **	0.02470
0-4	0.01805	** : **	0.01918
Total	0.33772		0.14872

Total pop. : 0.4864
0-14 as % pop. : 0.34
60-80 as % pop. : 0.05
F 15-44 as % M 20-59 : 3.70

	female		male
80+	0.00001	:	0.00000
75-79	0.00007	:	0.00011
70-74	0.00044	:	0.00052
65-69	0.00114	:	0.00129
60-64	0.00199	:	0.00233
55-59	0.00380	:	0.00496
50-54	0.00458	: *	0.00621
45-49	0.00546	* : *	0.00741
40-44	0.00599	* : *	0.00873
35-39	0.00672	* : *	0.01010
30-34	0.01775	** : ***	0.03197
25-29	0.03904	**** : *******	0.07024
20-24	0.04419	**** : ********	0.07958
15-19	0.05199	***** : **********	0.09857
10-14	0.02406	** : ****	0.03579
5-9	0.02152	** : ***	0.03036
0-4	0.00805	* : *	0.00928
Total	0.23680		0.39745

Total pop. : 0.6343
0-14 as % pop. : 0.20
60-80 as % pop. : 0.01
F 15-44 as % M 20-59 : 0.76

Fig. 4. *Year 40 : New domestics (1) and new exports (2) populations.*

II. *THE SIMULATION : ASSUMPTIONS AND INITIAL RESULTS.*

The simulation is a digital model written in the Pascal language, in which such events as birth, death and enslavement take place once a year for any number of years. The following summary presents the terminology of the model and the order of magnitude of the demographic parameters used in the simulations (although all parameters in the model are variable). Populations are defined by sex and for ages from 0 to 80+. The initial populations defined are the Raided and Raiders populations, each with a life expectation at birth of 27.5 years and a growth rate of 0,5 % per year : this gives them a birth rate of 42 per thousand and a death rate of 37 per thousand [7]. A raid takes place each year (such an assumption, while it would be an oversimplification for any local area within Western Africa, is relevant for the continental area as a whole). In the raid, an average one percent of the Raided population is captured. The raid thus creates, in each year, a Captive population. It suffers a severe initial mortality, averaging 15 % of the Captives, including those losing their lives in the course of capture and those dying as a result of disease and exposure while in captivity. The Captives then undergo a partition, in which two thirds of the female Captives are retained in Africa while two thirds of the male Captives are exported. Those retained in Africa, the New Domestics, are added to the population of Domestic slaves. Those exported undergo another severe mortality, averaging 15 % and corresponding to the Middle Passage ; the survivors become New Exports who join the Export slave population in the New World.

The output from the simulation includes, for each year, statistics with several sorts of dimensions : stocks of population at a given year's end, flows of population per year, cumulative totals of population over a period of years, and various ratios and combinations of these. The output begins with the population by age and sex of the Raided, Raiders, Domestics and Exports, and of Slave Society (the sum of Raiders and Domestics) and the African Regional population (Raided, Raiders and Domestics). Also calculated for each year are populations of the Captives, New Exports, New Domestics, the number deceased in enslavement, and cumulative totals of each of these. Finally, the program calculates various ratios of sex and age groups, and rates of birth, mortality, migration and population growth.

(7) This population structure is the one selected by John Thornton as appropriate to the Kongo population for whom he analyzed a baptismal register. J.C. Caldwell argues that the eighteenth-century African life expectancy at birth was more like 20 years, in which case the death rate was above 50 per thousand. Thornton, « An Eighteenth-Century Baptismal Register and the Demographic History of Manguenzo », in Christopher Fyfe and David McMaster, eds., *African Historical Demography*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh, 1978), 405-415 ; Caldwell, « Major Themes in African Demographic History », in *ibid*, 7-23.

As examples of simulation results, Figure 2 shows the initial Raided and Raiders populations [8]. Figure 3, after 40 years of slave trade, shows the Raided and Slave Society (Raiders plus Domestics) : the decline in Regional population (the sum of the two) and the preponderance of females in the Slave Society population are evident. Figure 4 shows, for year 40 (and at a magnification by a factor of 100) the number and distribution of New Domestics and New Exports.

III. *PROPERTIES OF THE SIMULATION MODEL : SENSITIVITY ANALYSIS AND CALIBRATION.*

Since the model uses fourteen data files on population, fertility, mortality and migration (each data file consisting, in effect, of a two-by-eighty matrix), questions immediately arise as to the sensitivity of output to changes in input, and as to interactions among the various input files. This section summarizes the results of a sensitivity analysis of first-order and second-order (interaction) effects among input variables, an analysis which is discussed in more detail elsewhere [9]. The results show, happily for the analyst, that interactions among input variables are negligible, and that a limited number of input variables determine the character of output as measured on three key variables.

The sensitivity analysis and calibration begins with our historical window on the issue : the size and composition of the New Exports population. To link this population to the structure of the population remaining in Africa, we must define our *output calibration variable* (E or EXPRATIO) as the ratio of the flow of New Exports to the stock of the African Regional population. This formulation of the analysis requires us, therefore, to estimate the level of African population as a precondition to the analysis. The practical problems of such population projections are discussed in Section IV below. Once such problems are resolved, we emerge with a calibration variable whose projected levels, while not precise, nonetheless have a substantial empirical basis.

Results of the sensitivity analysis on this variable are shown in Table 1. Each of sixteen input variables was varied over the range of its presumed historical limits. Results, reported in the right-hand column as contributions to total R-squared, indicate the relative importance of input variables in causing variation in the output variable [10].

(8) The initial Raiders population is set as one third of the Raided population : the results of this assumption accord fairly well with available historical records.

(9) Patrick Manning and William S. Griffiths, « Divining the Unprovable : Simulating the Demography of African Slavery », *Journal of Interdisciplinary History 19*, 2 (1988), 177ff. This article also describes in more detail the operation of the simulation program.

(10) I would prefer to report the results as contributions of each variable to the total sum of squares, as is usually done in analysis of variance : the results would show some minor differences form those reported here. An ongoing disagreement between me and an SPSS program restricts the results, for the time being, to this form.

Table 1. *Sensitivity Analysis : Dependent Variable EXPRATIO*

Input variable	*Definition*	*Change in R-squared*
RAIDSEX	Ratio of females to males captured	.29
PCSIZEM	Proportion of male Captives exported	.21
RAIDPCT	Proportion of Raided captured	.12
PCSIZEF	Proportion of female capitves exported	.09
CAPDOSUR	Captive mortality in Africa	.07
RDDGROW	Raided intrinsic growth rate	.03
RDRGROW	Raiders intrinsic growth rate	.03
CAPEXSUR	Captive mortality, Middle Passage	.03
RAIDAGE	Inequality in Captive age distribution	.02
DOMGROW	Domestic slaves intrinsic growth rate	.02
Ten leading variables		.93
All first-order effects		.94
Second-order effects		.06
Total R-squared		.998

The results of this analysis indicate that the main determinants of E are the sex composition of the raid and the nature of the partition of captives into domestic and exported slaves. Other measurable effects are provided by the size of the raid, the mortality of captives and the growth rate of African population (which, in turn, depends primarly on fertility, since it is more likely to change than mortality). No interaction effect was as large as 1 % of total variance, and the sum total of interactions measured was 6 % of variance.

The next step in calibration is to establish historical limits on the size and composition of the stream of New Exports — limits which, by extension, restrict the levels of input data for the variables shown in Table 1. The levels of EXPRATIO are set, for each time period, as ratios of documented totals of slave exports to projected levels of African Regional population. In addition, two parameters are set for all times to limit the age and sex composition of simulated New Exports populations. For sex, the ratio of female New Exports to total New Exports is kept in the range from 0.3 to 0.4. For age, the ratio of New Exports aged 0-17 to total New Exports is kept within the range from 0.2 to 0.3 [11]. The combination of these output calibration factors serves to restrict the range of permissible input combinations.

(11) Manning, « Enslavement of Africans », 517.

With output calibration well under way, we may turn to the two major *output prediction variables*. These variables — the African Regional growth rate (G or GROWTH) and the ratio of women to men of marriageable age (S or SEXRATIO) in Slave Society — are not directly observable from historical data in the way EXPRATIO is. The research design, however, is to seek out correlations among the determinants of all three output variables, so that we may use documemted levels of EXPRATIO to project historical levels of GROWTH and SEXRATIO. This requires equivalent sensitivity analyses for the two output prediction variables.

Table 2 shows that the resultant African growth rate, under the impact of slave exports, correlate primarly with intrinsic growth rates of African populations (and thus with levels of fertility) and only secondarily with certain slave-trade variables : the size, sex and age composition of the annual raid (12). This result, which prevents us from saying that slave trade determined the rate of African population growth, nonetheless permits us to argue below that net African growth rates were negative in the slave-trade era *unless* the intrinsic African growth rate was greater than one percent per year.

Table 2. *Sensitivity Analysis : Dependent Variable GROWTH*

Input variable	*Définition*	*Change in R-squared*
RDDGROW	Raided intrinsic growth rate	.51
RDRGROW	Raiders intrinsic growth rate	.24
DOMGROW	Domestic slaves intrinsic growth rate	.06
RAIDPCT	Proportion of Raided captured	.08
RAIDSEX	Ratio of females to males captured	.04
RAIDAGE	Inequality in Captive age distribution	.03
Six leading variables		.95
All first-order effects		.98
Second-order interactions		.02
Total R-squared		.998

For the sex ratio in Africa, on the other hand, we find that the main correlates of SEXRATIO are almost identical to the determinants of EXPRATIO, and in almost the same relative importance : these are the variables defining the

(12) I assume here that levels of mortality underwent little change in precolonial Africa. This assumption is reconsidered below. It is interesting to note that changes in mortality (with fertility levels adjusted so as to maintain unchanged levels of net growth) did not lead to significant changes in EXPRATIO. Mortality and fertility data were drawn from Ansley J. Coale and Paul Demeny, *Regional Model Life Tables and Stable Populations* (Princeton, 1966).

size and composition of slave raids and of the partition between domestic and exported slaves. We may thus hope to predict the African sex ratio from what we know about the composition of the New Export slave population.

Table 3. *Sensitivity Analysis : Dependent Variable SEXRATIO*

Input variable	*Definition*	*Change in R-squared*
RAIDSEX	Ratio of females to males captured	.39
PCSIZEM	Proportion of male Captives exported	.30
PCSIZEF	Proportion of female Captives exported	.06
RAIDPCT	Proportion of Raided captured	.03
PCAGEM	Inequality of male age partition	.03
RDRMORT	Level of Raider mortality	.03
RAIDAGE	Inequality in Captive age distribution	.02
Seven leading variables		.88
All first-order effects		.92
Second-order interactions		.07
Total R-squared		.989

We may check the logic and consistency of the assumptions by combining results of these three tables. For example, if we could reduce the level of RAIDSEX and also increase the proportion of women exported, we could recalibrate EXPRATIO and project a more even sex ratio and greater growth in Africa. But the evidence against making such a change in assumptions includes the consistent excess of female slave prices over male slave prices in African markets, and the qualitative accounts attesting to the large number of female slaves in Africa.

IV. *HISTORICAL PROJECTIONS AT THE CONTINENTAL LEVEL.*

The relatively well determined volume of the Atlantic slave trade provides the numerator for our output calibration variable. To obtain the denominator, however, we must turn to backward projection of population size. The best base line for such projections lies in estimates of African population for the 1930s : earlier estimates are far less reliable and later estimates, while more precise, are of dubious value for backward projection because of high rates of recent population growth. The base year for population projections is thus 1931, and the fundamemtal source for population levels is R. R. Kuczynski's survey of British

colonial demography [13]. From the figures given in Kuczynski, and with equivalent populations given in French, Belgian, and Portuguese publications, I have drawn together estimated 1931 populations for the various regions from which slaves were earlier drawn (excluding, therefore, those areas which contributed to the trans-Saharan slave trade), and the total for the entire Western Coast of Africa [14]. This 1931 population is then projected back to 1850 on two sets of assumptions : first at an annual growth rate of 0.5 %, to get a high estimate of 1850 population, and then at an annual growth rate of 1.0 %, to get a low estimate. One problem with such projections, of course, is that they allow for no regional differentials : an early twentieth-century growth rate of two percent in Gold Coast seems likely, while for Congo at the same time a growth rate of 0.5 % is probably too high. Overall, however, these two projections probably provide good outside limits to the 1850 population of the Western Coast of Africa.

These limits on the projected aggregate 1850 population are now ready to be employed in the projection of previous levels of population, export ratio, growth rate and sex ratio. An intrinsic growth rate of 0.5 % per year is assumed for African populations before 1850. Beginning with the two estimates of 1850 population, EXPRATIO is calculated for the period from 1820 to 1850. From the functional relationships among EXPRATIO, GROWTH and SEXRATIO derived from the simulation model, the levels of GROWTH and SEXRATIO are calculated for the same thirty-year period [15]. Then the calculated level of GROWTH is used to project the population back to its 1820 level, and the process is repeated as far back as 1640.

Based on an average of the figures for each period shown in Table 5, we may also project various cumulative totals for the Atlantic slave trade, 1700-

(13) R.R. Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1948). John Thornton, speaking as a panelist at a 1982 Toronto convention, answered a question from the audience with the following quip, which effectively reveals the quandary of the demographic historian of Africa : « There are two methods of estimating precolonial African populations : one way is to project back from Kuczynski. The other way is to project forward from the Neolithic ».

(14) *Annuaire statistique de la Belgique et du Congo Belge, 1933*, (Brussels, 1934) ; *Annuaire statistique de l'Afrique Occidentale Française* (Dakar, 1950) ; *Annuaire statistique de l'Afrique Equatoriale Française* (Paris, 1950) ; *Annuario estatico do Angola* (Luanda, 1950). The regions into which these figures have been set are, insofar as is possible, the conventional regions for discussing the eighteenth-century export of slaves, as presented, for instance, in Paul E. Lovejoy, « The Volume of the Atlantic Slave Trade : A Synthesis », *Journal of African History 23*, 4 (1982), 473-501.

(15) These functional relationships, worked out in the study of a number of simulations, are not exact because of the large number of variables. But the following linear equations give an idea of the relationships.

for GROWTH : $G = .005 - 2.5\ E$
for SEXRATIO : $S = 1 + 83\ E$

Table 4. *1930 Population, by Slave Exporting Regions : Estimates for 1931, Projections for 1850.*

Region	*Estimated 1931 population*	*Projected Populations, 1850* *High Estimate 0.5% growth*	*Low Estimate 1.0% growth*
Senegambia	1,823,000	1,223,000	822,000
Upper Guinea	5,109,000	3,428,000	2,304,000
Gold Coast	5,029,000	3,374,000	2,269,000
Bight of Benin	5,237,000	3,514,000	2,363,000
Bight of Biafra	7,126,000	4,781,000	3,215,000
Loango	3,001,000	2,014,000	1,354,000
Angola	6,534,000	4,384,000	2,948,000
Western Coast of Africa	33,859,000	22,719,000	15,274,000

1850 [16]. As an accompaniment to the estimated nine million slaves landed in the New World in that time period, some twenty-one million persons were captured in Africa, seven million of whom were brought into domestic slavery, and five million of whom suffered death within a year of their capture.

The results displayed in Table 5 indicate a property of this projection which is heartening for the analyst : the two estimates of African Regional population for 1700 are closer together than those for 1850. In fact, this property is more general : whatever growth rates and whatever fertility rates are assumed for the African population, linking those assumptions to known levels of slave exports tends to make the estimates of African population converge rather than diverge as one goes back in time. This is the sort of result which can only provide fuel for more speculation, and hope for more deducive results which will narrow the range of empirical problems.

The remainder of this study, meanwhile, is devoted to applying the results obtained above to the main issues in precolonial African demographic history.

(16) The cumulative totals given in the simulation results are scaled up to the levels reported here by the ratio of the actual number of slaves reported in each 30-year period to the 30-year cumulative total of New Exports reported by the simulation.

Table 5. *Projected aggregate population, E, G, and S, 1640-1860.*

		Mean annual	*High estimate of 1850 population*				*Low estimate of 1850 population*			
Date	*Period*	*new exports*	*Population (millions)*	*EXPRATIO*	*GROWTH*	*SEXRATIO*	*Population (millions)*	*EXPRATIO*	*GROWTH*	*SEXRATIO*
1850			22.7				15.3			
	1820-50	54,000		.0024	-.001	1.20		.0035	-.0038	1.29
1820			23.4				17.1			
	1790-1820	60,000		.0025	-.0014	1.22		.0035	-.0038	1.29
1790			24.4				19.2			
	1760-90	70,000		.0029	-.0022	1.24		.0036	-.004	1.30
1760			26.1				21.6			
	1730-60	53,000		.0020	.000	1.17		.0025	-.0011	1.21
1730			26.1				22.3			
	1700-30	35,000		.0013	+.0016	1.11		.0012	+.0021	1.13
1700			24.9				21.6			
	1670-1700	25,000		.0010	+.0025	1.08		.0012	+.0021	1.10
1670			23.1				20.3			
	1640-70	15,000		.0006	+.0034	1.05		.0007	+.0032	1.06
1640			20.9				18.4			

V. *THE AFRICAN SEX RATIO.*

The simulation results above indicate that, in eighteenth-century Western Africa, the ratio of marriageable men to women rose by an ten to fifteen percent for the whole Regional population, and by twenty to thirty percent for the Slave Society population (17). Such a demographic shift at the continental level must have had its influence on social institutions. The institutions of polygyny in Africa unquestionably predated the slave trade, but the latter served to reinforce the former : one may thus postulate a series of transformations. When the export of slaves became large enough to limit population growth — the eighteenth-century for the continent as a whole, but as much as a century earlier in parts of Angola — the relative surplus tended to reinforce polygyny. It was now possible for even young men to have multiple wives. These same demographic conditions reinforced the dominance of women in agricultural work and in marketing in much of Western Africa. The proportion of women remained normal among the Raided, however, and the status of women there may have remained higher than in Slave Society.

These circumstances obtained until the mid-nineteenth century, when the decline in the number of slave exports led to an evening of African sex ratios. This meant not only a spurt in population growth, as Thornton has argued, but institutional change in Slave Society. The surplus of women having ended, men fought it out among themselves : the system by which men marry late in life in order that they may then have multiple wives was invented or reinvented. And the predominant role of women, slave and free, in agriculture was eased somewhat as more male slaves — now retained in Africa rather than exported — were set to work alongside them (18).

Important documentation of the surplus of women in eighteenth-century Western Africa comes from Portuguese censuses of Angola in 1777 an 1778, as analyzed by John Thornton (19). The census data reveal an overwhelming preponderance of women in the 15-40 age group. Free men were some 55 % of free women, and slave men were some 42 % of slave women : these figures yield female-to-male ratios of 1.8 and 2.4, respectively, which greatly exceed the maximum ratio of 1.3 calculated above in Table 5. Thornton found the fertility of these women to be an unsurprising one child every three years, but found, for this oddly-structured population, a crude birth rate of 82 per thousand and a crude death rate of 56 per thousand. This meant a net rate of increase of 26 per

(17) These results are quite similar to the estimated discrepancy in sex ratios proposed by Thornton, « Demographic Effect », 697.

(18) Thornton, « Eighteenth-Century Angola », 426. The mid-nineteenth-century expansion of plantation agriculture along the Western Coast of Africa fits neatly with this demographic change. The new produce fed a growing domestic market, but also led to exports of palm oil, peanuts and coffee. Manning, « Contours of Slavery », 853-854.

(19) Thornton, « Eighteenth-Century Angola ».

thousand, almost enough to offset the substantial annual loss of slaves of about 30 per thousand.

If such a population was representative of the whole of Angola, as Thornton asserted, then the numerical disparity between the sexes was far greater than I have argued above, and the ability of African populations to regenerate themselves was also far greater than I have suggested. To address this issue, I performed a number of simulation runs in attempt to generate an African Regional population like that in the Angolan census and at the same time link it to a stream of exports consistent with historical data : the proportion of females among New Exports, always low for Angola, was reduced in the simulations to 0.25 [20]. To replicate the census population, one must hypothesize that the Raiders collect many females as Captives, export very few of them, and export almost all male slaves. This is easily written into the simulation, but for the process to result in a stream of exports which was even 20 % female, an immense African trade in female slaves must be postulated. In such a case, however, we must also postulate a substantial mortality in that trade, and the creation of African areas where women were in short supply : population growth would have been hindered on both accounts.

The Angolan censuses, while presumably valid for those areas under Portuguese control, should not be taken as a model for the whole of Western Africa, nor for the whole of modern Angola. They show, instead, the remarkable demographic conditions which the slave trade produced. When combined with the results of the present continental analysis, however, the census shows that those remarkable areas, in the course of their creation, also led to the creation of obverse demographic conditions in adjoining areas.

VI. *GROWTH IN AFRICAN POPULATION.*

The sensitivity analysis in Table 2 above shows that the net growth rate of African population in the era of slave trade was determined primarily by the intrinsic growth rate, and only secondarily by the size and composition of slave raids. Thus the question of whether African population grew or declined in the era of slave trade depends heavily on the inherent limits on African growth rates, and on the flexibility of those growth rates.

Early writers on African population, lacking information, tended to assume an unchanging population : A. M. Carr-Saunders, summarizing these speculations in 1936, placed the population of Africa in 1500 at 100 million, and left it unchanged in 1900. This would leave some 30 to 35 million people on the Western Coast of Africa [21]. John C. Caldwell, an authoritative writer on

(20) Herbert S. Klein, *The Middle Passage* (Princeton, 1978), 223.
(21) A.M. Carr-Saunders, *World Population, Past Growth and Present Trends* (Oxford, 1936), 34-35.

African demographic history, has taken the position that the population of the Western Coast of Africa was relatively small at the time of the European discoveries, and grew because of the adoption of American crops. He contrasted the African population in 1900 with this small projected figure, and argued that African population must have grown fast enough to overcome any negative influence of slave exports. Indeed, if an uninterrupted growth rate as low as 0.5 % is projected back from an 1850 population of 25 million, the result is 9 million in 1650 and 4 million in 1500. I think this « late growth » thesis on African population growth must be replaced by an « early growth » thesis : yams provided good food, well known since very early times; descriptions of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Gold Coast, Benin and Angola present areas that Europeans saw as densely populated [22].

On the basis of intercontinental comparisons, a long-term net growth rate of 0.5 % would appear to have been very high in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century world. English population growth, according to Wrigley and Schofield, reached as high as one percent per annum in that period, but averaged half that amount [23]. Thus an intrinsic African growth rate of 0.5 %, which I have taken as an average in the simulations, should perhaps be treated as a maximum, but the simulation model suggests that no growth rate of less than one percent could have counterbalanced the loss of slaves in the late eighteenth century.

According to this reasoning, African Regional population fluctuated from 1700 to 1850 in the area of 20 million. If the initial population were smaller, then the withdrawal of from 15,000 to 60,000 slaves per year would have had a more serious effect, which could only have been overcome by a very great increase in fertility, or a sharp decline in mortality. The main argument for a decline in mortality in the slave-trade era relies on improvements in nutrition with the arrival of maize, manioc and peanuts, but the case has yet to be made in detail [24].

Could it be that, under the impact of slave trade, Africans increased their fertility to replace those who had been lost ? In the short run this was difficult because the persons lost were, disproportionately, young adults. Thus the Raided were put in the position either of asking parents of teen-agers to start another family, or of asking for more children precisely from the group most seriously

(22) Caldwell, « Major Questions », 13-14 ; Manning, *Dahomey*, 22-25 ; Ray A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore, 1982) ; A.F.C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897* (London, 1969) ; Georges Balandier, *Daily Life in the Kingdom of Kongo* (London, 1968) ; Caldwell, « Comment on Manning », *Canadian Journal of African Studies 16*, 1 (1982), 127-130 ; Jouke S. Wigboldus, « Trade and Agriculture in Coastal Benin c. 1470-1660 ; an examination of Manning's early-growth thesis », *A.A.G. Bijdragen* 28 (1986), 299-380.
(23) E.A. Wrigley and R.S. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 183-184, 214.
(24) D.G. Coursey, *The Yam* (London, 1971) ; Marvin P. Miracle, *Maize in Tropical Africa* (Madison, 1966) ; Joseph C. Miller, « The Significance of Drought, Disease and Famine in the Agriculturally Marginal Zone of West-Central Africa », *Journal of African History 22*, 1 (1982), 17-61.

reduced in numbers. In this sense, slave raiding had the demographic impact of a war rather than of a famine or epidemic. In the longer run, given African family patterns, this problem was compounded. In the European family structure, marriage was relatively late in life and not all women married. European families could thus respond to demographic crisis by increasing fertility in two ways : women could marry younger and in larger proportion. In African family patterns — if we may safely project nineteenth and twentieth-century patterns back into earlier days — women married soon after puberty, and virtually all women married. African women could increase fertility rates only by spacing their children more closely or by continuing to have children until a later age [25]. But given African lactation practices — children are generally nursed past the age of two, and spacing follows accordingly — spacing children more closely was likely only with the death of an earlier child. For women to continue childbearing until later age would seem to have been the main option for increasing fertility. Overall, it is not clear that, by an act of the will, African women struck by the influence of slave trade could have overcome the previous limits on their fertility.

Another formulation of the question of the impact of slave trade on African population growth is to consider the counterfactual African population which would have existed in the absence of slave exports. Joseph Inikori has constructed estimates of this counterfactual population suggesting, for the continent as a whole, that a cumulative total of 30 million slaves exported would have produced an additional stock of 112 million Africans by 1880 [26]. In making these calculations, he assumed an African net rate of reproduction based on that among slaves in the American South, thus applying fertility patterns of a small, sparse population in a low-mortality area to a larger, denser population on a continent with a high level of mortality. An equivalent but smaller estimate of this counterfactual population emerges from the simulation model, which projects a « stable » population, i.e., that which would exist in the absence of slave raids. With a growth rate of 0.5 %, the 1700 populations estimated in Table 5 at from 22 to 25 million would have led to 1850 populations of from 46 million to 53 million, more than double the actual 1850 population.

Against the counterfactual increase in population in the absence of slave trade must be set the counterfactual limits on population posed by drought, epidemic, and demographic crisis generally. The strongest position of this sort has been proposed by Joseph Miller, who has argued in detail, for the Angolan region, that the restraints on population set by epidemic and drought were more serious than the drain of slave exports [27]. The significance of these restraints must be acknowledged, and at the same time it is clear that slave trade, regardless of other effects, provided a substantial limit to African population : the impact of slave exports was all the more severe in areas such as Angola and the Bight of Benin that were large-scale, long-term slave exporters.

(25) I am indebted to John D. Post for this useful contrast.
(26) Inikori, « Introduction », 31-33.
(27) Miller, « Significance of Drought », 28-30.

Perhaps equally relevant to the choice of whether natural crises or slave exports caused the most demographic harm is the question of how these human and natural causes of misery interacted. The two might offset each other : if slave trade acted as an « institutionalized demographic crisis » and prevented population from growing to its Malthusian limits, then the level of African famine and epidemic might thereby have been reduced. The opposite of the argument is at least equally credible : slave trade caused increased migration and thereby spread disease (including smallpox, which was apparently not known on the Western Coast of Africa before arrival of the Europeans); the removal of young adults reduced overall productivity and made famine more likely; and the warfare and displacemet were generally bad for population growth. Causal forces also operated in the opposite direction; famine and epidemic increased the number of slaves on the market in the short run, but reduced the Raided population in the longer run [28].

Whatever the details of the interactions between slave trade and natural demographic crisis, the consideration of the two at once tends to reinforce the picture of a relatively slow average rate of African population growth, and therefore supports the hypothesis of a relatively large population on the eve of the slave trade. These considerations also highlight an important issue which has escaped careful discussion : the pattern of precolonial African mortality. The two models of mortality among which future research must distinguish are those of a high intrinsic rate growth (and thus high fertility) and of relatively frequent peaks in mortality to yield a slow long-run growth rate, or a low intrinsic rate of growth (lower fertility) and a relatively consistent level of mortality, leading to a stationary population or a slow and uneventful growth. The first model seems more applicable to the drought-prone regions of Angola and Senegambia, while the second applies better to the intervening and well watered coast [29].

VII. *MORTALITY IN THE SLAVE TRADE.*

The average mortality in the Middle passage declined from 15 % in the eighteenth-century to 10 % in the nineteenth-century. Two elementary points on this statistic are worthy of emphasis. First, when converted from a per-voyage basis to a more standard mortality per unit time, the figures may be analyzed more usefully [30]. Second, mortality was a schedule, not an across-the-board rate : its levels varied by age and sex.

(28) *Ibid.*
(29) Caldwell, « Major Questions », 10-11 ; Philip D. Curtin, « Nutrition in African History », *Journal of Interdisciplinary History 14*, 2 (1983), 380-381.
(30) Joseph C. Miller, « Mortality in the Atlantic Slave Trade : Statistical Evidence on Causality », *Journal of Interdisciplinary History 11*, 3 (1981), 389-392.

Mortality in enslavement was in some ways a multiplication of normal mortality through disease and exposure, but in other ways the brutality of the experiences struck all captives similarly : healthy young adult slaves suffered a special mortality when they resisted or rebelled. In constructing Captive mortality files for the simulation therefore, I took both factors into account : I began with the survival schedule for the Raided and raised it to the fifth power (thus providing five years' mortality at once), and then subtracted an across-the-board factor of 0.08 from the survival level at each age, which yielded an average 15 % loss in the Captive population. This schedule reveals a distinction in the age composition of those who survived and those who succumbed : young adults were the targets of slave raids, and they tended to survive the process of enslavement. Children and the old, while enslaved in smaller but still significant numbers, commonly failed to survive the initial stages of captivity. The population pyramid for Lost Captives, those who lost their lives in enslavement, is still thickest at the young adult ages, reflecting their large numbers, but it also includes many children.

Captive mortality rates were shown in the sensitivity analysis to be of some significance in determining the export ratio (Table 2) and, by extension, the growth rate of African population. While mortality in the Middle Passage is known in considerable detail, captive mortality in Africa (the more significant factor) remains shrouded in mystery. Joseph Miller's study of Atlantic slave mortality notes two causes of deaths in the Middle Passage — illness before boarding and conditions on board — and argues that the former was the main cause [31]. This argument implies a relatively high mortality in the later stages of captivity within Africa, although Miller implicitly assumes a low mortality in the initial stages of captivity. Perhaps the initial mortality was low for those who were kidnapped and high for those captured in war.

VIII. *AGES OF CAPTIVES.*

Most figures on the ages of enslaved Africans must be viewed with suspicion, because different observers used varying age categories, and because of Europeans' notorious inability to judge African ages. On the other hand, numerous estimates of slave ages are available, and the question of the age distribution of slaves is important to a general assessment of the impact of slave trade. The proportion of children in the Atlantic slave trade was generally lower than that in the African populations from which they were drawn; in the

(31) Miller, « Mortality in the Atlantic Slave Trade ». For a discussion of whether Miller would have benefitted by using regression analysis on his data, see Raymon L. Cohen and Richard A. Jensen, « Mortality in the Atlantic Slave Trade », *Journal of Interdisciplinary History 13*, 2 (1982), 317-329 ; and Miller, *ibid.*, 331-336.

simulation shown in Figure 2 above, children of ages 0-14 were 34 % of the initial population; Figure 3 shows them as 26 % of the Captives and 20 % of New Exports. Recorded proportions of children in groups of slave voyages range from 7 % to 50 %, but average 25 % [32].

Possible reasons for the shortage of children among slave exports include a decision to capture relatively less children than adults, a partition in which most child slaves are kept in Africa, and a relatively high level of child mortality upon enslavement. While this question of age distribution has little bearing on our three main output variables, it is of significance for the relative size of the Raided and Raiders populations in Africa. I have assumed that the Raiders, having a short-term perspective because of the fragility of young slaves, preferred not to invest in slaves until they could yield an immediate return, and thus tended to leave children behind — though children were surely easier to capture than adults. In this case the remaining children could soon help replenish the Raided population. If, on the other hand, Raiders had some good use for children beyond selling them to Europeans, they captured children in large numbers and thus made Raided population growth more difficult.

An analogous issue awaits us at the other end of the age range. Ships' records almost never list old slaves, and this has tended to create the impression that persons over 40 — or even over 30 — were virtually never exported as slaves. But I think there were more New Export slaves of advanced age than is commonly realized, because of considerations at each step of the trade. First, old persons were a sizeable part of the population (the model population for the simulation includes 7 % who were over 60, 16 % over 50, and 27 % over 40). Since African slave buyers had limits to their demand for such slaves, and since European purchasers did need to fill out their cargoes, a price could be found at which older slaves would be purchased to cross the Atlantic. In the simulation above, New Exports include 1 % over 60, over 4 % over 50, and 9 % over 40. Still, some 70 % of the New Export slaves remain within the ages of 15 and 40.

IX. *REGIONAL PATTERNS IN SLAVE EXPORTS.*

In contrast to the fairly smooth overall expansion and contraction of the level of slave exports, the experience of various segments of the African coast varied widely from their sum. And while the simulation is constructed on a neat distinction between the Raiders and the Raided, it is clear that in reality those

(32) Manning, « Enslavement of Africans », 517. According to the simulation, if children were captured at the same rate as adults and partitioned in the same way as adults, they would fall from 34 % of the Raided population to 31 % of the New Exports population because of differential mortality.

roles were often exchanged or shared [33]. So I will offer, in this section, three regional patterns whose discussion may add some clarity and nuance to the aggregate trends in Atlantic slave trade.

The first pattern is a half-century cycle of expansion and decline in slave exports which may be observed in several regions : in the Bight of Benin and the Gold Coast at the turn of the eighteenth-century, in Angola in the mid-seventeenth century and again in the late eighteenth century, and in the Bight of Biafra at the turn of the nineteenth century. The fluctuations are commonly discussed in terms of political and economic choices, but I believe the demographic logic of the cycle can be verified [34]. Once an area became committed to slave exports, the commerce expanded until it brought a regional depopulation (export rates of over three percent per annum have been calculated for parts of Angola and the Bight of Benin), after which slave exports declined.

The remaining two regional patterns are discussed in terms of prices : one pattern is longitudinal and the other is cross-sectional. The longitudinal analysis involves the comparison of prices and quantities of slave exported. For the Bight of Benin, this sort of analysis has been phrased in terms of shifting long-run slave-supply schedules and their elasticities. For the period from the 1670s to the 1700s, prices rose slowly but the volume of slave exports rose dramatically : this was interpreted as expansion along a long-run slave supply schedule with an elasticity of 1.5. From the 1700s to the 1730s, the price of slaves quadrupled, but the quantity of slave exports declined somewhat : the region's population was being exported at the rate of 3 % per year, and even the high returns could not keep the number of slave exports from declining. But for the period from the 1740s to the 1790s, the long-run slave supply schedule stopped shifting inward. The institutions and the demography of enslavement stabilitzed, and the volume of slave exports moved up and down with prices, with an elasticity of 2.2. Analogous stories can be told for each region of the coast [35].

The last regional pattern is a proposed explanation of why the proportion of women exported from some regions fell as low as one fourth, and why in other regions it rose to as high as one half. These differences can mainly be explained in terms of prices and costs. The first key fact is that the prices for female adults in Africa were always higher than for males, while the reverse was the case for prices paid by European purchasers. This was because of women's reproductive potential but also because they were nearly as productive physically as men yet were less able to resist or escape than men [36]. In interior regions, female

(33) Indeed, the simulation itself cannot be run for mch more than fifty years without threatening the Raided with extinction.

(34) The terms of this debate, contrasting political and economic models of enslavement, were set by Philip D. Curtin in *Economic Change in Precolonial Africa : Senegambia in the Era of the Slave Trade*, 2 vols. (Madison, 1975), I : 156-157.

(35) Manning, *Dahomey*, 37-42 ; for an equivalent analysis in Senegambia, see Curtin, *Senegambia*, I : 158-168.

(36) For discussion of the reasons why African prices of female slaves were high, see Klein and Robertson, *Women and Slavery in Africa*.

Captives could be sold near at hand, while the only way to get a good price for a male slave was to march him to the coast. Children had no special premium price in the interior, but they tended to be kept there because a long march to the coast would cost more in mortality and maintenance than what the child would bring on arrival. But women and children captured near the coast could be sold to the Europeans without foregoing great opportunities or incurring large costs. Thus slaves exported from interior areas — the Bambara in Senegambia, the Hausa via the Bight of Benin and the Luba and Lunda via Angola — were heavily male. In contrast, slaves captured near the coast — in the Bight of Biafra and in Gabon — included women and children in fairly large numbers [37].

X. *A DEMOGRAPHIC SACRIFICE.*

This simulation of the demographic impact of the Atlantic slave trade provides support for the hypothesis of African population decline through the agency of the slave trade. Evidence exists which will eventually be able to confirm or reject this hypothesis, but it is scattered in qualitative and quantitative accounts that will require many years to track down and synthesize. The great advantage to the simulaton, in addition to its ability to generate predictions even when data are in short supply, is that it points out which types of data are most important to retrieve. The list is not short, but it can be presented in order of priority. It begins with the need for information on growth rates of African population (this means levels of mortality and, more importantly, levels of fertility). Next is the need for data on the age and sex structure of the captives, followed by the need for data on the division of captives, by age and sex, into those retained in Africa and those exported overseas. Finally, we need further information on the mortality of captives while still in Africa.

This question of the demographic impact of slave exports addresses not only the problem of reconstructing the history of African society, but also the demographic and economic role of Africans in the modern world. David Eltis, in a remarkable comparative study, has shown that in the period before 1820 there were some eight million African immigrants to the New World and some two million European immigrants, but that in 1820 the New World white population of over twelve million was roughly twice the black population [38]. Blacks failed to keep up with whites because they arrived (on average) later, but also because of the high mortality which was the slave's lot, the high mortality regions into

(37) Manning, « The Enslavement of Africans » 517, 522 ; Klein, *The Middle Passage*, 149, 223 ; Curtin, *Senegambia*, I : 176 ; David Northrup, *Trade Without Rulers* (Oxford, 1975), 239 ; K. David Patterson, *The Northern Gabon Coast* (Oxford, 1975), 80.

(38) David Eltis, « Free and Coerced Transatlantic Migrations : Some Comparisons », *American Historical Review 88*, 2 (1983), 279.

which they were crowded, the low proportion of women among slave immigrants, and the low fertility of slave women resulting from isolation, overwork and perhaps voluntary restriction. At the same time, the population of Africa was restricted and reduced by the loss of slaves.

Africa provided the bodies and souls for a great sacrifice to the development of the Americas (39). Those who gave were Africans who lost their loved ones; those given up were the enslaved who lost control over their lives and, too soon, life itself. As is common with sacrifices, those given up did not go voluntarily. Those who oversaw successive stages of the sacrifice were not only pious but greedy and corrupt. Much of the sacrifice itself was wasted. And while some of those transported as victims survived to produce succeeding generations able to carry on and even to prosper, most did not. We may argue about whether the sacrifice was necessary; the point is that it was made. As we look back on this paintful stage in the creation of the modern world, it is appropriate to honor the memory of those who were given up; the sacrifice did lead to advance for a broader Atlantic community, if not for the African portion of that community.

(39) David Brion Davis has posed the problem of the role of slavery in the moral and intellectual development of the Americas — the ironic contribution of slavery to democratic revolution, for instance. He notes in passing the analogous problem of the contribution of slavery to the economic construction of the New World. This provides a reformulation to the much-discussed Williams thesis. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Western World* (Ithaca, 1966), 3-28 ; Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (London, 1944).

LA DIFFUSION DE LA GRAVURE DU *BROOKS* PAR LA SOCIÉTÉ DES AMIS DES NOIRS ET SON IMPACT

La Société des Amis des Noirs est certainement l'une des plus célèbres associations de la période révolutionnaire, mais aussi l'une des plus mal connues. Véritable Arlésienne, son histoire n'a encore jamais pu être écrite, tous les papiers la concernant semblant avoir définitivement disparu. Mais, heureusement, la récente réapparition des papiers personnels de Brissot, que le leader girondin avait mis en sécurité juste avant son arrestation, et dont une bonne partie concerne justement l'activité de la Société des Amis des Noirs (registre des séances, discours de Brissot à la Société, importante correspondance sur les affaires coloniales) va permettre de relancer l'étude de cette Société.

Nous nous contenterons aujourd'hui d'étudier l'influence qu'a eu en France la diffusion par la Société de la gravure du vaisseau négrier anglais le *Brooks* sur le débat qui avait été ouvert sur l'abolition de la traite négrière.

Fondée le 19 février 1788, la Société des Amis des Noirs connut une première année difficile : son recrutement modeste, environ une centaine de membres, mais de qualité puisqu'ils appartenaient souvent à la noblesse libérale (Lafayette, le duc de la Rochefoucault, Condorcet) aux grands milieux d'affaires et professions libérales (Clavière, Lavoisier), aux gens de lettres (Boufflers, Mercier) lui assure une grande influence dans l'intelligentsia de l'époque. Mais elle souffrit du départ pour les États-Unis, au bout de quelques mois, de son bouillant secrétaire Brissot de Warville et du refus du premier ministre Lomenie de Brienne de lui reconnaître une existence officielle en lui permettant de publier ses règlements et différentes publications.

Cependant, dès le début de 1789, elle se donne un président prestigieux et dynamique avec Condorcet. Profitant de la neutralité bienveillante de Necker, il décide que la Société doit poser avec éclat devant l'opinion publique, la question de l'abolition de la traite négrière et de l'amélioration du sort des esclaves dans nos colonies. Pour se faire, il adresse une lettre aux présidents de tous les baillages de France pour qu'ils proposent que ces questions soient inscrites dans les cahiers de doléance des trois ordres de chaque baillage. Au cours du premier semestre 1789, la Société, où Brissot de retour des États-Unis a repris sa place, publie ses règlements et la liste de ses membres et multiplie les réunions de ses assemblées générales qui connaissent un assez grand succès. Le but immédiat est de conquérir l'opinion publique par des articles dans la presse et la publication de brochures concernant la traite et l'esclavage, mais il y a peu d'études françaises sur le sujet et l'on sollicite constamment le secours de la grande sœur aînée, la Société anglaise de Londres, pour l'abolition de la traite, fondée en 1787, et qui a été à